



BACK BAY observer

The Official Newsletter of the Back Bay Amateur Astronomers
P.O. Box 9877, Virginia Beach, VA 23450-9877

EPHEMERALS november 2012

11/30, 7:00 pm
Garden Stars
Norfolk Botanical Gardens

12/06, 7:30 pm
BBAA Monthly Meeting
TCC VA Beach
Building J, Room JC-12

12/07
Skywatch
Northwest River Park

12/15
Nightwatch
Chippokes State Park
Surry, VA

12/15, 12:00 pm
Anniversary Luncheon
Fire & Vine
Virginia
Beach, VA



Looking Up!

Editors Note: This month's Looking Up column was written by BBAA's Astronomical League Correspondent, Bill McLean. President Courtney Flonta will return as the regular author.

Some of us may not know about the Astronomical League. Most of you know more about it than I do, so feel free to skip this and go on to more exciting articles.

Georgie June was the first [Astro League Correspondent](#) for the BBAA and, up to a few years ago, was its main cheerleader. She encouraged many of us to try an ["Observing Program."](#) Many start with the [Messier Program](#) as did I. It took me a few years to complete it. One can "work" on these as one wishes. As for me, I'd log Messiers one night, then observe other objects for up to months at a time without logging, then log a few more, or occasionally even dedicate all night and log nearly a dozen. There is no rush or timeline to complete these programs. My rule of thumb was: If I enjoy it, do it.

I am now chugging through the [Herschel 400 Program](#). The beauty of having a program in progress is that when I am out I get to choose; observe my favorites again (and again), or, if the mood and the sky conditions move me, "work" on the program. I like having an option and an observing plan even though I don't have to do anything to prepare for it. I carry my list of Herschels whenever I go out observing.

Some of us are overtly campaigning to become the BBAA's next [Master Observer](#) (we have two: Cliff Hedgepeth and Ted Forte) and are on a blitz to work as quickly and carefully as possible. You go Nick... bless your retinas!

Continued on page 3

CONTENTS

Ephemerals	1
Looking Up	1
Meeting Summary	2
Club Info	3
Forgetful Astronomy	5
NASA Space Place	4
2012 Fall ECSP	7
Calendar	8

BBAA Meeting Minutes & Summary

November 1, 2012

- The meeting was called to order by Pres. Courtney Flonta at 7:30 pm.

- Members in attendance were Neill Alford, Nick Anderson (via Skype from Blacksburg), Kenny Broun, Tom Flatley, Courtney Flonta, Mark Gerlach, Jeff Goldstein, Chuck Jagow, Dave Kratz, Curt Lambert, Matt McLaughlin, Joey Quinn, George Reynolds, Mat Snellings, Bernie Strohmeier, Jim Tallman, & Lawrence "Bird" Taylor. Visitors were Dominic Bologna, Beth Cox, Sulay Elescano and Bill Rust.

- Secretary Kevin Swann was stuck at work, so there was no Secretary's report. George took notes for the meeting minutes.

- Treasurer's Report: General Fund \$1799.66, Scholarship Fund \$2469.92, for a total of \$4269.58. Income from dues was \$117, while \$1250 came in from Beach Events for Boardwalk Astronomy. Expense paid out was \$1500 to Rachel Wilbur for her scholarship.

Treasurer's Report:

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Officer Election:

- The floor was opened for nominations for 2013 club officers. Nominees for president were Courtney Flonta and Jim Tallman; for Vice-president, Mark Gerlach and Chuck Jagow. Secretary Kevin Swann and Treasurer Bernie Strohmeier were unopposed.

- After the close of nominations, a secret ballot was conducted. Members wrote their choices for the four offices on pieces of paper, which were collected and counted by two members, George Reynolds and Curt Lambert. (Remote attendee Nick Anderson showed his ballot onscreen to George, who recorded it and threw it into the hat.)

- President-elect for 2013 is Courtney Flonta, Vice-President-elect is Chuck Jagow. Secretary Kevin Swann and Treasurer Bernie Strohmeier will fill those rolls again next

year. The new officers will assume their duties January 1, 2013.

Observing reports:

- Observing reports were made by several of the members. It was suggested that calendars again be purchased for the active members.

November Schedule:

- Friday, 9 Nov Skywatch, dusk to midnight
- Wednesday, 14 Nov, Presentation to Ron Shaneyfelt's Landstown High School Astronomy Club, 2 pm
- Thursday, 15 Nov, Cox High School Sky Watch, hosted by Jeff Goldstein, 5-9 pm
- Friday, 16 Nov, Boy Scouts observing, West Road, 5-9 pm
- Monday, 19 Nov, tentative sky observing at ODU (not yet confirmed)
- Also not yet confirmed is a possible Moonwatch at Princess Anne Library later in November
- Friday, 30 Nov, Garden Stars at Norfolk Botanical Garden, 7 pm.

Sky Show:

- At 8:05 pm the business meeting was adjourned, and the meeting re-convened in the TCC Planetarium for a special sky show presentation by Professor Ken Broun. The feature began with a Halloween laser light and music show, which was dazzling. The main event was an engrossing movie entitled, "The Secret Life of Stars", narrated by Patrick Stewart, who took us on a trek to the stars.
- Ken told the club that the planetarium has been upgraded, and made infinitely more versatile and powerful than it was before. Though the number of computers necessary to run the planetarium was cut in half (from 18 to 9), the software upgrade from Version 3 to Version 5 is a giant leap in capability and control. He will be attending a workshop in Utah in December to learn how to operate the new system and convert his sky shows so they will run on the new operating system.
- The meeting was adjourned at the end of the sky show, with a lot of favorable comments by the members concerning the new planetarium system.

The Back Bay Amateur Astronomer's
Observer

The BBAA Observer is published monthly; the monochrome version is mailed to members who do not have internet access. Members who do have Internet access can acquire the full color version on the Internet at <http://www.backbayastro.org/observer/newsletter.shtml>

Please submit articles and items of interest no later than the date of the monthly meeting in order to be in the next month's edition.

Please submit all items to:
bbaa.newsletter@gmail.com or BBAA Observer, P.O. Box 9877, Virginia Beach, VA

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BBAA Meetings

The BBAA meet the first Thursday of every month except for July. While school is in session, we meet at the VA Beach TCC Campus. The December meeting will be held at TCC in Virginia Beach, Building J, Rm JC-12 at 7:30 pm. Directions available at www.backbayastro.org.

BBAA Internet Links

BBAA Website
www.backbayastro.org

Yahoo! Groups
tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/backbayastro

BBAA Observer Newsletter
www.backbayastro.org/observer/newsletter.shtml

Looking Up, continued from page 1

Others are being very low key about the programs they are doing and never mention what they are up to until they get the certificate of completion.

Whatever floats your boat! Please email me with any questions (email address above). The only dumb question is the one not asked. Oh, and don't forget to take a gander at the [A.L. website](#).

Reminder: For all us Venus transit observers- we have till the end of the year to get our observing info turned in to get the pin!

[Carpe Noctem!](#)

Bill McLean

New A.L. Observing Program!!

Looking for a little variety in your observing? If so, the Astronomical League has you covered with their new Asterisms Observing Program.

Asterisms are patterns of stars that can be recognized as connect-the-dot shapes. The most famous for northern observers is the Big Dipper. There are many other naked eye asterisms, as well as ones that are best seen in binoculars or through the eyepiece.

The Asterisms Program has a list of 100 to keep you busy. For more information see <http://tinyurl.com/ALasterisms>

A Cosmic Tease: Trials of the Herschel Space Telescope Science Teams

By Dr. Marc J. Kuchner

Vast fields of marble-sized chunks of ice and rock spun slowly in the darkness this week, and I sat in the back of a grey conference room with white plastic tables spread with papers and laptops. I was sitting in on a meeting of an international team of astronomers gathered to analyze data from the Herschel Infrared Observatory. This telescope, sometimes just called Herschel, orbits the Sun about a million miles from the Earth.

The meeting began with dinner at Karl's house. Karl charred chorizo on the backyard grill while the airplanes dribbled into Dulles airport. Our colleagues arrived, jetlagged and yawning, from Germany, Sweden, and Spain, and we sat on Karl's couches catching up on the latest gossip. The unemployment level in Spain is about twenty percent, so research funding there is hard to come by these days. That's not nice to hear. But it cheered us up to be with old friends.

The meeting commenced the next morning, as the vast fields of ice and rock continued to spin—shards glinting in the starlight. Or maybe they didn't. Maybe they didn't exist at all.

You see, this team is looking at a series of images of stars taken by a device called a bolometer that is blind to ordinary starlight. Instead, the bolometer inside Herschel senses infrared light, a kind of light that we would probably refer to as heat if we could feel it. But the idea of pointing the bolometer at the stars was not to collect ordinary starlight. It was to measure heat coming from the vicinity of these stars, like an infrared security camera, in case there was something else to be found lurking nearby.

4

And lo and behold, for a handful of stars, the bolometer measurements were off the charts! Maybe something was orbiting

these stars. From the details of the bolometer readings—which channels lit up and so on—you would guess that this stuff took the form of majestic fields or rings of icy and rocky particles. It would be a new kind of disk, a discovery worth writing home to Madrid about.



Samuel Pierpont Langley, who developed the bolometer in 1878. His instrument detects a broad range of infrared wavelengths, sensitive to differences in temperature of one hundred-thousandth of a degree Celsius (0.00001 C). In 1961, Frank Low developed the germanium bolometer, which is hundreds of times more sensitive than previous detectors and capable of detecting far-infrared radiation.

There are several teams of astronomers analyzing data from the Herschel Space Telescope. They call themselves by oddly inappropriate sounding acronyms: GASPS, DUNES, DEBRIS. For the time being, the scientists on these teams are the only ones with access to the Herschel data. But in January, all the data these teams are working on will suddenly be released to the public. So they are all under pressure to finish their work by then. The team whose meeting I was sitting in on would like to publish a paper about the new disks by then.

Continued on page 5

Confessions of a Forgetful Astronomer

By Jim Tallman

Have you ever headed out to a night of stargazing and had that dreaded “I left something I need at home” feeling? I think we all have at one time or another, and many times that feeling comes to be a reality *after* you have arrived at your observing site.

It has happened to me so many times this past year, that I now get paranoid as I’m leaving the house. So I figured I’d toss some of my confessions out for the group to read and laugh at with the hope that maybe someone can learn from my forgetfulness and not burden other astronomers who took the time to plan properly.

Let’s start with power sources. This one item can trip up even those who don’t have GOTO or Intelliscope, and can end an evening very fast if you can’t power your dew heaters. Nothing like showing up somewhere and discovering you either left your battery at home, or that you failed to charge said battery. I have to admit that I have managed to achieve option number one but there is still time left in the year to earn my masters certificate in this area. The lack of power can cut your night short if you depend on dew heaters and/or you need to power a GOTO scope.



Forgotten equipment is not enough to keep BBAA from doing outreach. Here Jim Tallman shows off sunspots to an interested teen though his CPC-800 mounted on Bird Taylor’s Tripod.

How about leaving part of your scope at home? I’ve managed to pull some really good ones this year, like showing up to help Bird Taylor at the NASA Days event with everything I needed to do some solar observing except for my solar filter and, more importantly, the tripod for my Celestron CPC-800 Schmidt Cassegrain Telescope! Talk about being up the river without a paddle. Luckily Bird lived nearby and has the same scope, so he ran home to get his for me.

Continued on page 6

NASA Space Place, continued from page 4

But it’s not so simple. The stars that this team had measured were relatively nearby as stars go, less than a few hundred light years. But the universe is big, and full of galaxies of all kinds—a sea of galaxies starting from maybe a hundred thousand light years away, and stretching on and on. Maybe one of those background galaxies was lined up with each of the stars that had lit up the bolometer—fooling us into thinking they were seeing disks around these stars.

The team argued and paced, and then broke for lunch. We marched to the cafeteria through the rain. Meanwhile, vast fields of marble-sized chunks of ice and rock spun slowly in the darkness. Or maybe they didn’t.

What else did Herschel recently uncover? Find out at:

<http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/comet-ocean>

Dr. Marc J. Kuchner is an astrophysicist at the Exoplanets and Stellar Astrophysics Laboratory at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center. NASA’s Astrophysics Division works on big questions about the origin and evolution of the universe, galaxies, and planetary systems. Explore more at:

<http://www.science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/>

Forgetful Astronomer, continued from page 5

Let's see, my latest night-ending episode was to show up out at the Grundland Astronomy Park (GAP) in Hampton with my 14" Orion Truss only to find that I left the middle part of the scope at home. Does not do any good to have the two ends with the mirrors if you can't hold them apart! Luckily I have not left any of the control pads at home. Yet.

My crowning achievement this year was getting down to Coinjock for the East Coast Star Party, and getting all set up to do some solar observing only to find that I had left my eye piece box at home. What a pain in the bottom that was.

Not planning well for weather conditions is another common problem that will mess you up. Recently I looked at the weather and it just did not register that it was going to be a chilly night with wind. I planned for the chilly part, just not the windy part. So I showed up at the GAP with less than ideal clothing to last me through the night. I discovered this after finding I'd not be observing due to leaving half my scope at home. I had no real heavy warm clothes nor did I bring my sleeping bag, which is required for entrance into the GAP anyway. So, needless to say, my evening only lasted until about 9PM that night.

So, in closing, here are some tips that I've found to help those of us who are forgetful:

- Make up checklists for the different types of event you do away from the house. Something I need to do.
- Make up boxes for your gear. I have a general tool/fix it box, another box for all of my telescope cords, controls, and finder scopes (Pretty much all of the things you need to set the scopes up), as well as my eyepiece box.
- Check the weather and understand what you are seeing.
- Bring extra clothing when it is cold even if you think you are dressed right
- When it is warmer dress as accordingly so you don't get hot.
- Bring a snack and something to drink Hot or Cold.

My resolution for 2013 is to do better in all of the areas I managed to have epic failures with in 2012. Happy observing!

Jim Tallman



Welcome New Members

David Kratz

Mat Snellings

Cheryl McDonald

A Little Astro Humor (courtesy of George Reynolds)

Q: What was Charles Messier's response when they asked him about his list of objects?

Q: How do you organize a party in space?

Answers on bottom of page 7

2012 Fall East Coast Star Party

Good Friends, Superb conditions

Kent, you throw a mean Star Party...

What a great time we all had at East Coast Star Party! The weather was perfect and the skies were clear the entire weekend. The Milky Way was so bright and beautiful — an incredible sight. The highlights of the weekend: Dee's spaghetti, The Crescent Nebula, The Bubble Nebula, NGC 55, decorating the trees, Comet "Hamburger" and Comet McNaught, meteors everywhere, Uranus's moon, Orion, the Horsehead Nebula, the ISS Passover, the Salamander Nebula, the bald eagle that flew right over the cedars, Bob Hitt lighting up the grill at 1am to make hot dogs, and eating shrimp and caviar during cocktail hour!! My favorite part of the weekend: Kent ordering pizza from Ted in AZ and passing the phone around!

Kent, thanks for having another great ECSP! I'm already looking forward to the next one! Maybe by then our pizza will be delivered??

Georgie June



Clockwise from top left: Bob Beuerlein shows Courtney's Dad, Tony Flonta, his way-cool, home-built binocular chair; Kent & Georgie hold up a picture of long-time BBAA member Ted Forte who recently moved to Arizona and was on everyone's mind all weekend; Deep Sky enthusiast Nick Anderson gets prepared for a night of Herschel 400 objects under the clear Coinjock sky; Kent Blackwell, everyone's favorite Emcee, conducts the raffle drawing for a seemingly endless amount of cool prizes; a rag tag crowd of astronomers hoping their raffle ticket number gets called while Mark Gerlach and Jim Tallman prove that "he who buys the most ticket wins the most toys."

Answers to "Astro Humor" on page 6: 1) "No Comet"; 2) You planet. Please direct all groans to George Reynolds.



November/December 2012

BBAA Events	Special Outreach	Astronomical Events
	11/30 Garden Stars @ NBG	11/28 Full Moon
12/06 BBAA Monthly Meeting		12/06 Last Quarter
12/07 SkyWatch @ Northwest River Park		12/13 New Moon
12/15 Nightwatch @ Chippokes State Park		12/13 Geminids peak
		12/20 First Quarter



Sneak Peek into January

Thu 1/03/2013 BBAA Monthly Meeting, TCC Campus, 7:30 pm

Fri 1/04/2012 Skywatch at Northwest River Park

Sat 1/12/2012 Nightwatch at Chippokes State Park, Surry VA.

Fri 1/18/2012 Garden Stars at Norfolk Botanical Gardens, 7:00 pm